



## **Relationalism or why diplomats find international relations theory strange**

Adler-Nissen, Rebecca

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## *Conclusion: Relationalism: why diplomats find international relations theory strange*

REBECCA ADLER-NISSEN

### Introduction

Diplomats often find international relations (IR) books strange. If they read – or more likely reread (as many Western diplomats have studied IR theory at some point of their life) – Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*,<sup>1</sup> they shake their heads. When presented with metaphors of the state such as Wolfers's<sup>2</sup> famous billiard ball: "a closed, impermeable, and sovereign unit, completely separated from all other states," they look bewildered. Also non-realist IR scholarship appears odd to most diplomats. Finnemore and Sikkink's life cycle of norms<sup>3</sup> would seem as far from their daily work tasks as Jervis's game theoretical models of cooperation and conflict under anarchy.<sup>4</sup> Diplomats would anytime prefer the gossip in their embassy cables and the *Financial Times* (FT) to the models in *International Organization* or *International Studies Quarterly*. Not just because cables and FT provide a lighter read but also because they seem closer to what diplomats perceive as the "real world." What lies behind this estrangement between diplomats and scholars of international relations?

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Martha Finnemore and Kahtryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization*, 52(4), 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, 3(2), 1978.

Scholars in diplomatic studies have argued that the reason for the estrangement is to be found within IR theory itself. It is “dangerously reductionist,”<sup>5</sup> “rationalistic,”<sup>6</sup> focusing on macro decisions of super-powers,<sup>7</sup> or simply irrelevant – “locked within the circle of esoteric scholarly discussion” as US diplomat David D. Newson put it.<sup>8</sup> Arguably, IR theory has failed to acknowledge the logic of practice in diplomacy,<sup>9</sup> and it does not capture the bodily experience to being a diplomat.<sup>10</sup> However, the authors of the preceding chapters have demonstrated that the problem is more fundamental: IR scholars have ignored that diplomacy helps constitute world politics. To bring out the ways in which this constitution takes place, the chapters in this book have employed a relational approach.

In this conclusion, which reflects critically on this approach and its wider consequences, I argue that diplomats are estranged from IR theory – and vice versa – because IR scholars generally subscribe to *substantialism*, whereas diplomats tend to think in terms of *relations*. In fact, a deeper understanding of these relations is a key theoretical take-away point of this book. More specifically, the chapter argues that relationalism – as a meta-theoretical approach – not only helps us understand the diplomatic production of world politics, relationalism also reflects a particular ontology, which differs fundamentally from the worldview that most IR scholars subscribe to. As I suggest, most IR scholars depart from the social phenomenon they want to study, for example, states, diplomats, soldiers, organizations, treaties, companies, and women.<sup>11</sup> Assuming a

<sup>5</sup> Carne Ross, *Independent Diplomat: Dispatches from an Unaccountable Elite* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 146.

<sup>6</sup> Harald Müller, “Arguing, Bargaining and All That: Communicative Action, Rationalist Theory and the Logic of Appropriateness in International Relations,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 10(3), 2004; Jeffrey Lewis, “The Janus Face of Brussels: Socialization and Everyday Decision Making in the European Union,” *International Organization*, 59(4), 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Wiseman, “Bringing Diplomacy Back In: Time for Theory to Catch Up with Practice,” *International Studies Perspectives*, 12(4), 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Newson (2001) quoted in Stephen Walt, “The Relationship between Theory and Policy in International Relations,” *Annual Review Political Science*, 8, 2005, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Vincent Pouliot, “The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities,” *International Organization*, 62(2), 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Iver B. Neumann, “To Be a Diplomat,” *International Studies Perspectives*, 6(1), 2005.

<sup>11</sup> See also Patrick J. Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, “Relations before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 5(3), 1999.

priori the existence of these phenomena (e.g. states or individuals) and ascribing certain characteristics to them, they develop substantive theories. Consequently, diplomacy is reduced to the mechanics of states bumping into each other or a system of reciprocal signaling.

However, most diplomats know, in an embodied but often unarticulated sense, that world politics is deeply relational. Their job is to make those relations “work,” and they are convinced that important knowledge can be gained by consulting and meeting with foreign powers, that is, “the other.” As such, they subscribe to a relational thinking (shared to some extent by diplomatic scholars). Relationalism takes as its point of departure the idea that social phenomena making up world politics always develop in relation to other social phenomena. Thus, for example, states are not born into this world as fully developed states that then “exist”; states are made in continuous relations with other states and non-state actors. The development, consolidation, weakening (or even disappearance) of states can only be understood in terms of continuous processes that play out in relation to other social processes. These ontological and epistemological differences between much of IR scholarship and diplomatic knowledge and practice are important for how we understand (and construct) world politics, including war, international cooperation, and responses to human and natural catastrophes.

The chapter is organized as follows. The next section illustrates diplomats’ relational ontology and construction of national interests with an anecdote from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and an account from a former US ambassador to France. The third section shows that substantialism may be part of the reason why IR theory, in its realist, liberalist, and constructivist versions, has produced reductionist images of diplomacy. Addressing this problem, the fourth section teases out the relational approach, which is advanced in this book, whereby diplomacy is seen as constitutive (or rather co-constitutive) of other international or transnational practices. The fifth and sixth sections examine the problems and limits of the relational approach adopted in this book, which still insists that diplomacy is the mediation of estrangement: first, the risk of downplaying the consequences of diplomacy’s move from representation toward governance and second and the risk of seeing diplomacy as politically “empty” (and thus innocent) practice that can be addressed separately from questions of power. The chapter concludes that if IR theory is to begin closing the

gap between the theory and practice of world politics, as scholars such as Walt have called for,<sup>12</sup> it will need to acknowledge other forms of knowledge than the substantialist version dominating political science today.

### Diplomacy as “folk relationalism”: we would never talk about “win-sets”

The first argument that I wish to make, drawing on the preceding chapters, is that the diplomatic worldview differs from that of IR scholars. This helps explain their mutual estrangement. More specifically, many IR scholars have a substantialist view of world politics, whereas many diplomats subscribe to “folk relationalism.”<sup>13</sup> By “folk relationalism,” I understand the commonsensical way of carving up the social world in what the anthropologists Ladislav Hóly and Milan Stuchlik call “folk models,” that is, people’s representations of their own world – stylized schemata of social facts, ideas of relations and social causes that people work by in their everyday lives. They are learned or experienced assumptions about how the world works that help navigate social relationships, conflicts, and needs that they have in ordinary life.<sup>14</sup> Diplomatic action, as I will show, also proceeds based on a particular representation of the world. This has important implications for the construction of national interests, as the following example illustrates.

When I was working as a head of section in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA; 2010–11), I once showed an academic article on EU foreign policy to a colleague. I was employed full time at the MFA, but I continued to teach the IR undergraduate course at the university, and I was interested in my colleague’s thoughts on the article, which was on the students’ reading list. My colleague, who was responsible for EU foreign policy coordination in the MFA, read it. In the lunch canteen, he said: “It’s too bad your students never learn how diplomacy really works.” “What do you mean?” I asked. He answered, “I mean this is so far from reality. We would never talk about ‘win-sets’ . . . You

<sup>12</sup> Walt, “The Relationship Between Theory and Policy in International Relations.”

<sup>13</sup> I thank the editors for this formulation.

<sup>14</sup> See also Iver B. Neumann and Ole Jacob Sending, “The ‘International’ as Governmentality,” *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, 35(3), 680.

know how Michael [our head of department] likes to put it: 'it's about being within target,'" my colleague said.<sup>15</sup> In the course of my stint at the MFA, I learned that "being within target" was extremely difficult to pin down in words. It was not always based on a calculation of interest, but more a gut feeling. You knew when it sounded right, when you had described our national position in the right terms.

Of course, my colleague's criticism of the article may just reflect his self-construction or professional identity.<sup>16</sup> For instance, few people think about their choice between two supermarkets as related to their indifference curves. Yet, economists have effectively demonstrated that – as abstract and idealized as they may be – indifference curves actually provide an accurate description of consumer behavior. So perhaps my colleague, the diplomat, did not know himself well enough. My colleague, however, insisted that this was not the case. He leaned over and said, "the problem is that he [the scholar] believes that national interests are fixed prior to negotiations. But we always keep brackets."

With "we always keep brackets," my colleague referred to the way we drafted the national position and speech notes for the foreign or prime minister. While the MFA would collect background material weeks ahead of the meetings in Brussels, the paragraph explicating the national position and bullet points for the minister were often kept in brackets or left blank until the very last hours before a meeting.<sup>17</sup>

This anecdote suggests that diplomats think in terms of processes and relations rather than substances. Diplomats know that international negotiations require a certain degree of flexibility and adaption of national positions. As Sending shows in Chapter 9, they draw on intuitive flairs or social skills that help them steer the negotiations in the

<sup>15</sup> "Det handler om at være inden for skiven" in Danish.

<sup>16</sup> For fascinating analyses of diplomatic scripts and reflectivity, see Neumann, "To Be a Diplomat"; Iver B. Neumann, "A Speech That the Entire Ministry May Stand for," or: Why Diplomats Never Produce Anything New," *International Political Sociology*, 1(2), 2007; Costas M. Constantinou, "Between Statecraft and Humanism: Diplomacy and Its Forms of Knowledge," *International Studies Review*, 15(2), 2013.

<sup>17</sup> This is an interesting parallel to Neumann's observation that keeping brackets as a way of wielding influence (Iver B. Neumann, *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012], 114).

preferred direction. Of course, some negotiations are based on clearly formulated and fixed goals such as security partnerships, trade rounds, or membership accession agreements, but even such negotiations require a certain degree of subtleness in terms of presentation of positions, timing, and an ability to make compromises. Moreover, national interests may change in the course of the negotiation process as the involved parties learn more about the issue and their opponents and as the negotiations gain their own momentum.

This ever-changing nature of national positions has been accepted to some degree in the bargaining literature. For instance, two-level game approaches acknowledge that domestic politics affects diplomacy continuously. Putnam even admits that

formally speaking, game-theoretic analysis requires that the structure of issues and payoffs *be specified in advance*. In reality, however, much of what happens in any bargaining situation involves attempts by the players to restructure the game and to alter one another's perceptions of the costs of no-agreement and the benefits of proposed agreement.<sup>18</sup>

Yet Putnam (and others) still assumes that there is such a thing as a national win-set. Putnam needs a priori assumptions and win-sets to make his theory work. In many occasions, however, a negotiation has no clear beginning. This was also the case one century ago. The seasoned diplomat Henry White, reflecting on his experience as US ambassador to France (1906–9) and as representative of the United States at a range of international conferences from the 1880s to the 1910s, explains how negotiations often start with vague ideas. For instance, the International Agriculture Conference, held in Rome in 1905,

assembled not only with a very vague idea as to what shape, if any, its labors would assume, but with a strong conviction on the part of a majority of the delegates that no result at all was likely to be attained, beyond perhaps a demonstration of good will to the Italian sovereign and nation.<sup>19</sup>

However, as a result of the “zeal and tact of the very able men composing the Italian delegation, encouragement and interest took place of

<sup>18</sup> Robert D. Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games,” *International Organization*, 42(3), 1988: 454, my italics. As Putnam writes, “much ambassadorial action ... has precisely this function” (ibid.).

<sup>19</sup> Henry White et al., “The Organization and Procedure of the Third Hague Conference,” *Proceedings of the American Society of International Law at Its Annual Meeting*, 6, 1912, 182.

skepticism and apathy.”<sup>20</sup> In the end, the negotiations led to the sharing of information on agricultural products and the establishments of agricultural bureaus across much of the Western world. Diplomacy, in other words, helped construct the national interest, not just represent it. How did IR scholars come to believe in (or felt a need to assume) a pre-given national interest or win-set that determines negotiations?

### Bumping billiard balls and signals: two images of diplomacy in IR theory

To get at the core of the problem with most accounts of diplomacy (and why my colleague could not recognize himself in the academic article), we need to address the substantialist thinking inherent in much IR theory. I build here on Mustafa Emirbayer’s distinction between substantialist and relational social theory.<sup>21</sup> Within IR, Emirbayer’s relational manifesto has influenced Jackson and Nexon’s argument about the processual character of world politics,<sup>22</sup> leading them to argue – as diplomats would do – that relations come before states.<sup>23</sup> This brief section cannot do justice to the nuances and sophistication of the different IR theories; instead, it will point to a few basic assumptions that have limited IR scholars’ view of diplomacy.

Substantialism dominates much of social science and in particular IR theory. It claims that substances (things, beings, entities, essences) are the “units” or “levels” of analysis and that they exist prior to the analysis. Emirbayer uses Norbert Elias to trace the analytical fondness for substances (things, beings, essences) back to the grammar of Western languages.<sup>24</sup> One example is the wind, “the wind is blowing.”

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Mustafa Emirbayer, “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(2), 1997, 283.

<sup>22</sup> Jackson and Nexon, “Relations before States.”

<sup>23</sup> With a different purpose, Albert et al. have argued that large-scale change is only intelligible with a relational ontology, and Guillaume has constructed a relational-dialogical approach to provide a more nuanced understanding of subjectivity and the development of national identities. See Mathias Albert, David Jacobson, and Yosef Lapid, eds., *Identities, Borders, Orders: Rethinking International Relations Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); and Xavier Guillaume, “Foreign Policy and the Politics of Alterity: A Dialogical Understanding of International Relations,” *Millennium*, 31(1), 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Emirbayer, “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology,” 283.



"We speak as if the wind were separate from its blowing, as if a wind could exist which did not blow."<sup>25</sup>

The idea of that a state has (i.e., possesses) a particular national interest as mentioned earlier, is illustrative of IR's substantialism. In a constructivist version that interest is socially constructed, yet at the most fundamental level – "before interaction" – it is the desire to survive that drives states.<sup>26</sup> However, as poststructuralist and feminist IR scholars have demonstrated,<sup>27</sup> while one may show that the state is partially a social construction as Wendt does, many of the processes that construct the state as a subject – including diplomacy – will be left out of the analysis when the essentialist ontology sneaks in.

### *Self-action: diplomacy as states bumping into each other*

According to Emirbayer, there are two substantialist positions: "self-action" and "inter-action." Following a self-action perspective, things are "acting under their own powers" and "there exists things which inherently possess being" (e.g., the soul in Christian theology).<sup>28</sup> In modern social theory, the self-action perspective is expressed in arguments about the existence of the will and methodological individualism. Within IR theory, liberal and rational choice approaches assume that human beings and states act rationally to maximize utility,<sup>29</sup> whereas social identity theorists believe that social status is the main behavioral driver.<sup>30</sup> We also find the self-action perspective in norm-following

<sup>25</sup> Elias, quoted in *ibid.*, 283.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization*, 46(2), 1992, 402.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Roxanne L. Dory, "Aporia: A Critical Exploration of the Agent-Structure Problematique in International Relations Theory," *European Journal of International Relations*, 3(3), 1997; Jonathan D. Wadley, "Gendering the State: Performativity and Protection in International Security," in Laura Sjoberg, ed., *Gender and International Security: Feminist Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2010), 44.

<sup>28</sup> Emirbayer, "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology," 283.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization*, 51(4), 1997.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Jonathan Mercer, "Anarchy and Identity," *International Organization*, 49(2), 1995; Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott, "Identity as a Variable," *Perspectives on Politics*, 4(4), 2006.

individuals or states (pursuing internalized norms).<sup>31</sup> More holistic, structuralist or system-oriented theories seek to avoid assumptions about motives (e.g., Durkheim or Waltz) but assume the existence of the phenomenon they seek to study, that is, society (Durkheim) or the state system (Waltz). From a structuralist realist perspective, diplomacy is close to irrelevant because of the “irreducible” security dilemma.<sup>32</sup> Scholars in the defensive realist camp of structural realism are typically less pessimistic, because they believe that certain forms of soft-line diplomacy can mitigate, although not eliminate, the security dilemma.<sup>33</sup> It is perhaps also in the substantialist approaches that Humes’s legacy is most apparent in IR theory: We cannot observe the act of causation; we can only observe that the motion of the first billiard ball is followed by the motion of the second billiard ball. And so we infer causation. Diplomacy then becomes the mechanisms of states bumping into each other.

### *Inter-action: diplomacy as reciprocal signaling*

Following inter-action theory, the relevant action takes place among the entities themselves. At first sight, the inter-action version of substantialism resembles relationalism and allocates a greater role for diplomacy. However, things in inter-action are “in causal interconnection” against one another.<sup>34</sup> Thus, entities remain fixed and unchanging throughout such interaction, each independent of the existence of the others. This is where Jervis’s foreign policy signals fit in.<sup>35</sup> The inter-actionist approach is also detectible in diplomatic language itself: deep-rooted expressions such as “normalizing” or “severing” diplomatic ties; the former is a signaling device for approval or recognition, while the latter sends strong signals of dissatisfaction without necessarily any military intentions.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See James Fearon and Alexander Wendt, “Rationalism v. Constructivism: A Skeptical View,” *Handbook of International Relations*, 2002, 58.

<sup>32</sup> See also Iver B. Neumann, Chapter 5, this volume.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Glaser, “The Security Dilemma Revisited,” *World Politics*, 50, 1997.

<sup>34</sup> Emirbayer, “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology,” 285.

<sup>35</sup> Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma.” For a relational view of the security dilemma, see Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Geoff Berridge, *Talking to the Enemy – How States Without “Diplomatic Relations” Communicate* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 7. The language of diplomacy is rife with references to ongoing production and reproduction of a

The inter-action perspective can also be found in constructivism's symbolic interactionist roots. As Copeland writes in a (critical) review of Wendt, "each actor's conception of self (its interests and identity) is a product of the others' diplomatic gestures."<sup>37</sup> While Wendt reinforced a focus on state interactions, he bracketed off diplomatic and domestic processes.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, diplomacy became understood as a system of reciprocal signaling that affected state identities and interests.

Liberals in the interdependence tradition tend to replace the signaling with a cobweb, thereby giving diplomacy a greater role.<sup>39</sup> But this complex diplomatic network of negotiation is not in and of itself in need of theorizing; instead, it is the interests of the states that are in focus, together with levels of trust, economic independence, and so on. Globalization and "soft power" scholars come closer to a relational approach, by focusing on the interrelated and connected nature of world politics. Yet substantialist assumptions sneak in. For instance, Nye argues the following:

A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries want to follow it, admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness . . . This aspect of power – getting others to want what you want – I call soft power. It co-opts people rather than coerces them.<sup>40</sup>

Soft power clearly is about relations, including diplomatic relations, yet, "values," "models," "prosperity," or "openness" are possessed or represented by the state, according to Nye. None of this includes relations of mutuality or intersubjectivity, and they are seldom put specifically at work in a concrete analysis.

However, in the past two decades, the "new diplomacy" literature has brought attention to the increasing involvement of NGOs, citizens, and private companies in diplomatic negotiations. Diplomatic scholars

mediated international order. See Rebecca Adler-Nissen, "Diplomacy as Impression Management: Strategic Face-Work and Post-Colonial Embarrassment," CIPSS Working Paper Series, 38, Center for International Peace and Security Studies (Montreal: McGill University, 2012).

<sup>37</sup> Dale C. Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay," *International Security*, 25(2), 2000, 188.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>39</sup> Christer Jönsson and Martin Hall, *Essence of Diplomacy* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 17.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 5.

have identified changes in the relations between, for instance, new and old forms of diplomacy, pointing to the role of companies and NGOs,<sup>41</sup> and have shown that in addition to bilateral and multilateral forms of diplomacy, the “polylateral” (or non-state) form of diplomacy has become more predominant.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, diplomatic scholars have discussed what causes these changes. Some have argued that the changes in diplomatic practices can be explained by external factors such as the end of the Cold War, globalization, shifts in the traditional balance of world power, and regionalization.<sup>43</sup> Alternatively, the change may be termed as a form of “mutual adaption” of diplomacy to new technological, cultural, and political contexts.<sup>44</sup> Following this approach, we can analyze change in specific interests and relative power positions between official state representatives and their relations to multinational companies, NGOs and multilateral arenas, but it is less clear whether and how diplomacy as such is also changing. More radically, in terms of transformation, Sharp concludes that “public diplomacy is merely the latest of a series of waves seeking to transform diplomacy and to point us to a world which will not need it.”<sup>45</sup> However, as the editors note, much of the new diplomacy literature remains actor-centric, reflecting more an inter-actionist view of the world. This makes it blind to the processes that produce changes in diplomatic practice.<sup>46</sup>

In sum, in its self-action or inter-actionist versions, IR theory tends to bracket diplomacy away or use particular interests or actors as proxies for diplomacy. IR theory often searches for kicks of exogenous change (since its units are usually left unchanging), leaving the change itself unexplainable. The new diplomacy literature brings us closer to

<sup>41</sup> Andrew F. Hocking and Brian Cooper, “Governments, Non-governmental Organisations and the Re-calibration of Diplomacy,” *Global Society*, 14(3), 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Geoffrey Wiseman (1999), ““Polylateralism” and New Modes of Global Dialogue.” Reprinted in Christer Jönsson and Richard Langhorne, eds., *Diplomacy*, Vol. III. Discussion Papers, No. 59, Leicester Diplomatic Studies Programme, 36–57 (London: Sage, 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Pauline Kerr and Geoffrey Wiseman, eds., *Diplomacy in a Globalizing World: Theories and Practices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> See Jan Melissen, ed., *Innovation in Diplomatic Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

<sup>45</sup> Paul Sharp, “Diplomacy, Diplomatic Studies, and the ISA,” *International Studies Perspectives*, 13, 2011, 718.

<sup>46</sup> Ole Jacob Sending, Chapter 9, this volume.

diplomacy as a research object – and to the way it changes – but has tended to fall back on inter-actional arguments, evaluating the interaction between state-based and non-state diplomacy. The next section discusses how Emirbayer's alternative, what he calls a trans-action perspective or relational social theory. This perspective is implicit in the way in which this book understands diplomacy.

### Relationalism: diplomacy as social entanglement

In relational theory, the terms or units derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that relation. Thus, the relationship is a dynamic unfolding process. Relations become the primary unit of analysis (rather than the constituent elements themselves). Contrary to self-action and inter-action perspectives, with trans-action or relationalism, "systems of description and naming are employed to deal with aspects and phases of action, without final attribution to 'elements' or other presumptively detachable or independent 'entities,' 'essences,' or 'realities,' and without isolation of presumptively detachable 'relations' from such detachable 'elements.'"<sup>47</sup>

Examples of this way of thinking can be found for instance in Marx's understanding of class as a relational (not pre-given) phenomenon. The bourgeoisie exists only in relation to the working class. Another example is Bourdieu's field theory, which shows that social practices are never isolated activities. A human practice, for instance playing golf, cannot be understood in itself and as a practice for its own sake. People may play golf because they like to do so, but playing golf also brings "distinctive gains" (at least in the 1970s) in contrast to, for instance, rugby.<sup>48</sup> Relationalism can also be found in Cynthia Enloe's analysis of diplomats' wives who appear as almost invisible women, but who help promote the national interest abroad and are complicit in the global injustices that produce hierarchies between the Third and the First World.<sup>49</sup> To analytically isolate the wives from our understanding of (the male) diplomats is therefore problematic.

<sup>47</sup> Dewey and Bentley, quoted in Emirbayer, "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology," 286.

<sup>48</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Sport and Social Class," *Social Science Information*, 17(6), 1978, 828.

<sup>49</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1990).

Similarly, this book has shown that diplomacy is not an isolated, detached activity.<sup>50</sup> Tilly famously argued that “states make war and war makes states.”<sup>51</sup> This book adds: so does diplomacy. More specifically, diplomacy is co-constitutive of other practices. For example, Barkawi shows that diplomacy and war cannot be separated as easily as diplomatic scholars (and diplomats) suggest. The underlying rationale of the diplomatic profession may be to facilitate orderly and peaceful relations among states,<sup>52</sup> but this is not necessarily done peacefully. As Barkawi demonstrates, the a priori (substantialist) classification of war and the juridical fiction of the state as a unitary actor hinder understanding its true nature, including the way war helps sustain a particular order. The Correlates of War project, which conducts quantitative research into the causes of warfare since the 1960s, builds on a classification of war that makes it possible to argue that the coup against Guatemala’s Arbenz in 1954 was not orchestrated by the United States because “interstate war is defined as organized violence between two sovereign states involving at least one thousand battle deaths over the course of a year.”<sup>53</sup> The international administration of war is a web of relations.<sup>54</sup> In Hurd’s chapter, it is argued that the “essentially state-centric nature of diplomacy could conceivably change if non-state actors become more central to public international law.”<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Seabrooke identifies change in the sense that brokers take over a number of diplomatic tasks. Importantly, but this remains more obscure, this change of actors also implies a change in the nature of diplomacy.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the diplomatic system cannot be defined by its structure, but by “the conflicting relations, which maintain reproduce and sometimes transform it.”<sup>57</sup> These conflicting relations involve soldiers, lawyers, religious groups, consultants, human right activists,

<sup>50</sup> In many ways, the new diplomacy literature evokes this entanglement but steers away from an explicit theorization of it.

<sup>51</sup> Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 170.

<sup>52</sup> James Mayall, “Introduction,” in Paul Sharp and Geoffrey Wiseman, *The Diplomatic Corps as an Institution of International Society* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Tarak Barkawi, Chapter 2, this volume. <sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ian Hurd, Chapter 1, this volume.

<sup>56</sup> Leonard Seabrooke, Chapter 7, this volume.

<sup>57</sup> James Der Derian, *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

citizens, and a range of other people. Diplomacy is deeply entangled with other practices, and it is not separate from the states it helps constitute. Consequently, the distinction between war and diplomacy (which is so central to most theories of diplomacy) is problematic. This brings us back to diplomatic studies' somewhat rosy account of diplomacy, which this book has begun to undermine.

### Diplomacy beyond the mediation of estrangement

If diplomacy is as deeply entangled in world politics as this book suggests, it raises the question of whether diplomacy can still be seen as the mediation of estrangement, or if that notion risks concealing more than it reveals. I understand mediation in Der Derian's abstract way as the mediation of distinct identities,<sup>58</sup> not as the concrete practice of third-party mediation between two or more conflicting parties in terms of reconciliation that Neumann analyzes.<sup>59</sup> This book, while steering away from an explicit definition of diplomacy, adopts a mediation perspective on diplomacy, in insisting with Sharp that diplomacy requires a "condition of separateness."<sup>60</sup> Diplomacy is about constituting and representing states as separate units.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, a classic argument in diplomatic theory (and in diplomatic self-understanding) is that diplomats are essentially mediators. Previously, Neumann has described diplomacy as a third culture, that is, a culture for mediation between political entities with diverse cultures.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Sharp's diplomatic theory of international relations insists on diplomacy

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> The starting point for Der Derian's genealogy is the terminology for alienation, which was used first as a noun – the "other," "another" or as a verb *alienare*, which meant "to take away" or "to remove" something. Following Der Derian, necessarily ambiguous identities derive from the fact that the principle of universality (e.g. God, and economic and political rights) is estranged from the beings and they have to "share" this notion also among one another – which necessarily leads to their alienation from one another. This means that they can only recognize themselves or the others completely, if the principle of universality works. The diplomatic process arguably resembles the necessity of mediation between identities being left in the confusion about themselves and others, in which constant cognition and recognition of the actors is in place at all times. Iver B. Neumann, Chapter 5, this volume.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> Ole Jacob Sending, Chapter 9, this volume.

<sup>62</sup> Neumann, "To Be a Diplomat."

retaining separateness between entities, individuals, cultures, and states.<sup>63</sup> For Hall and Jönsson, diplomacy is “a timeless, existential phenomenon.”<sup>64</sup> It is constitutive of any international society and at the most abstract level, “diplomacy can be analyzed as the mediation of *universalism* and *particularism*.”<sup>65</sup> Somewhat similarly, Sending and Neumann argue that diplomacy “derives its strength in part from allowing disagreement and contestation, also over the appropriate form and content of diplomacy in different situations.”<sup>66</sup> As Sending puts it, “diplomacy constitutes a ‘thin’ inter-subjective space inasmuch as it includes a minimum standard, or expectations, to ‘keep on talking.’”<sup>67</sup>

There is a great deal of ambivalence in these different calls for acknowledging diplomacy as a mediating practice, from the English School pluralists (Bull and Butterfield) to Constantinou’s poststructuralist calls for humanism in diplomacy.<sup>68</sup> They range from pragmatic system maintenance to more uncompromising attempts to sustain “global hope” and “restore diplomacy as a virtue.”<sup>69</sup> In Lynch’s account, religio-theological debates give a primary role to diplomacy to mediate and manage the tension between universalist (Christianity) and particularist authority claims (state sovereignty) as well as between the Christian and the non-Christian other.<sup>70</sup> As she demonstrates, the quest for universalism can be envisaged in very different ways (from cosmopolitanism to moral leadership or more pessimistic forms of system maintaining), leading to different forms of mediation (with different moral and political agendas) and consequently different forms of diplomacy.

However, the scholarly defense of diplomacy’s (postulated) ability to mediate distinct ideas or world visions is problematic. While mediation

<sup>63</sup> Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*.

<sup>64</sup> Jönsson and Hall, *Essence of Diplomacy*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 25. Emphasis in original.

<sup>66</sup> Ole Jacob Sending and Iver B. Neumann, “Banking on Power: How Some Practices in an International Organization Anchor Others,” in Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, eds., *International Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 236.

<sup>67</sup> Ole Jacob Sending, this Chapter 9, volume.

<sup>68</sup> Constantinou, “Between Statecraft and Humanism.”

<sup>69</sup> Costas M. Constantinou and James Der Derian, “Sustaining Global Hope: Sovereignty, Power and the Transformation of Diplomacy,” in Costas M. Constantinou and James Der Derian, eds., *Sustainable Diplomacies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

<sup>70</sup> Cecelia Lynch, Chapter 6, this volume.



may sound like a relational idea, it often conceals inter-actionist assumptions, failing to fully access how diplomatic ideas and practices of mediation themselves are productive of particular politics. While we may agree with the importance of separation or respect for differences, we need to dissect carefully the idea that diplomacy always equals mediation of estrangement.

Ambassador White's account may serve again as illustration. Whether the negotiations concerned regulation of sugar trade, imperialism in North Africa, or agriculture, the Ambassador recalls that "a certain amount of kindly hospitality was exceedingly efficacious in *greasing the wheels* of the conference, as I have so often known it to be in the settlement of other diplomatic questions."<sup>71</sup> Ambassador White represented the United States in the Algeiras Conference in 1906, addressing the Tangier crisis (Germany had attempted to prevent France from establishing a protectorate over Morocco). The chief concern of most delegates was that the conference should not break up without an agreement, as this would possibly lead to war. The US ambassador reports the following:

I felt at the time, and have felt ever since, that it was owing to the perpetual exchange of views which took place day after day between the delegates outside the conference, and consequently, informally, and to the agreeable and intimate personal relations which could hardly fail to be established between a number of men of the world meeting all day long for three months, that all friction at the formal sessions was avoided, in spite of an amount of tension in the atmosphere prevalent almost to the end, and very difficult to realize by anyone who was not present.<sup>72</sup>

For the diplomat, "substance" is important, but in the end "the perpetual exchange of views" is crucial. "Greasing the wheels" is still a fitting metaphor for how diplomats think of their job. This reflects the

<sup>71</sup> White et al., "The Organization and Procedure of the Third Hague Conference," 182, emphasis added. The focus on greasing the wheels helps explain conflicts between line ministries and foreign ministries that disagree on whether "relations to foreign powers" are important, or whether "substance" regarding agriculture, environment, energy – or even security and defense – is more important. Thomas Nowotny, *Diplomacy and Global Governance: The Diplomatic Service in an Age of Worldwide Interdependence*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2012).

For diplomats, nothing is more important than process.  
<sup>72</sup> White et al., "The Organization and Procedure of the Third Hague Conference," 183–184.

diplomat's own understandings, her "folk relationalism," but it does not necessarily give us the full account of diplomacy's entanglement. While "diplomatic studies are closer to their subject – that is, diplomatic practice – than some IR students see as acceptable,"<sup>73</sup> this closeness should lead diplomatic scholars to "go native."

The practical knowledge of how to do diplomacy does have its own logic that "cannot be reduced to that of theoretical knowledge; that, in a sense, agents know the social world better than the theoreticians."<sup>74</sup> However, the scientist's work consists in making explicit this practical knowledge, in accordance with its own articulations.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, while diplomats may continue to think of themselves as system maintainers concentrating on "being within target," this book effectively shows that there is more to diplomacy than the mediation of estrangement (and that mediation has several meanings). The next two sections discuss the broader consequences of these findings, the problems that come with adopting a folk relationalist approach, and the risks of uncritically overtaking the diplomatic self-understanding as mediator.

### Diplomacy from system maintenance to governance

The first limit of the relational approach to diplomacy advanced in this book is that while it successfully shows diplomacy's move to governance, it has difficulty analyzing the way in which diplomats become policy makers. On the one hand, the chapters in this volume demonstrate that the sharp distinctions between diplomacy as representation and governing become untenable when adopting a relational approach. On the other hand, they *can* draw out all the implications because they insist that diplomacy (still) has to do with mediation between distinct identities or states.

For instance, several of the contributors to this volume show that diplomacy does not just involve representation of particular interests but also the construction of a more integrated international political order. If multilateralism has become the dominant form of diplomacy, then diplomacy – even when performed as representation – turns into a

<sup>73</sup> Sharp, "Diplomacy, Diplomatic Studies, and the ISA," 723.

<sup>74</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Chamboredon, Jean-Claude Passeron, and Beate Krais, eds., *The Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 252.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

form of governance. This is perhaps most evident in Pouliot's account of multilateral "group diplomacy" or PRIO cliques. Pouliot (and several other contributors to this book) approach diplomacy sociologically, identifying strategic moves in a Bourdieusian sense. Consequently, when Pouliot talks about how "multilateral diplomacy involves addressing multiples audiences simultaneously,"<sup>76</sup> he also shows the sociological impossibility of a sharp distinction between representation and governance. A great deal of "information asymmetry" exists in multilateral arenas that have grown increasingly complex and technical. The multilateral scene is secluded from home capitals, and yet it still features diplomats promoting national interests. In the EU, this turns into a form of late sovereign diplomacy.<sup>77</sup> The practice of "joining the consensus" that Pouliot analyzes is not entirely the same as the mediation "that allow[s] life to go on when major differences persist."<sup>78</sup> Instead, permanent representatives in different multilateral venues "develop a stake in the success of multilateralism itself, they seek to help their partners in trouble, and they contribute to the collective effort at compromise."<sup>79</sup> This form of diplomacy, while it involves "keep on talking" transcends national representation. It is in itself a form of global governance. In her analysis of the Concert of Europe and the effect of forum talks – that is, repeated face-to-face diplomacy – Mitzen concludes that even a world state requires a "diplomatic moment."<sup>80</sup> This might have been the case in the nineteenth century, but is it still the case?

Seabrooke begins to answer that question in his analysis of the outsourcing of diplomacy from governments, NGOs, and IOs to private actors. He distinguishes between traditional diplomatic mediation and brokering, the later involving market logics and the creation of new information.<sup>81</sup> Seabrooke's distinction hinges on the assumption that traditional diplomats are mediators who do not "actively create new information problems at the national and international levels."<sup>82</sup> Following this argument, consultancy groups such as Independent Diplomat may increase the heterogeneity of diplomatic actors, but

<sup>76</sup> Vincent Pouliot, Chapter 3, this volume.

<sup>77</sup> Rebecca Adler-Nissen "Late Sovereign Diplomacy," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 4(2), 2009.

<sup>78</sup> Constantinou, "Between Statecraft and Humanism," 158.

<sup>79</sup> Vincent Pouliot, Chapter 3, this volume.

<sup>80</sup> Jennifer Mitzen, Chapter 4, this volume.

<sup>81</sup> Leonard Seabrooke, Chapter 7, this volume. <sup>82</sup> Ibid.

not necessarily change diplomacy as a practice of representation and mediation (because arguably that's what diplomats do). Seabrooke concludes that outsourcing can help keep politically sensitive topics secret.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, outsourcing provides a perfect way of avoiding domestic scrutiny and legal responsibility.<sup>84</sup> It also makes it possible for diplomats to enter into a tricky game to simultaneously allow international cooperation and communicate a sense of sovereignty to the domestic audience. Diplomacy and diplomats are deeply involved in everything from humanitarian work to economic consultancy.

Hurd shows how international law and foreign policy are mutually constitutive: legal resources exist by virtue of being used by states to justify their policies, and state policies depend on a legal justification.<sup>85</sup> This view of international law as a political and strategic product, which shapes future negotiations (rather than an ordered system), has shaped insights in a range of academic fields, including postcolonial and development studies<sup>86</sup> and historical international relations.<sup>87</sup> However, diplomatic scholars have hitherto not shared such critical views of international law and governance. Perhaps they uncritically accept the diplomatic self-narrative: diplomats "grease the wheels" without ever becoming greasy themselves.

Neumann notes that "diplomacy is about the formulation and pursuit of national interests, and it is about systems maintenance."<sup>88</sup> Yet, as Neumann and the other contributors show, the pursuit of national interests is more complicated than IR usually admits. But so is the international system that diplomats help maintain. It is also not a stable, unchanging system. In fact, system maintenance has evolved, partly under the radar of public attention, to governance. Diplomacy is still focused on living together in difference, but this life together – in its

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen and Rebecca Adler-Nissen, "Introduction to Sovereignty Games," in Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen, eds., *Sovereignty Games: Instrumentalizing State Sovereignty in Europe and Beyond* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>85</sup> Ian Hurd, Chapter 1, this volume.

<sup>86</sup> Balakrishnan Rajagopal, *International Law from Below: Development, Social Movements and Third World Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>87</sup> Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson, eds., *Historical Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>88</sup> Iver Neumann, Chapter 5, this volume.

multilateral and networked forms – has become increasingly demanding for all parties involved. According to Sharp, the modern diplomat moves away from representing the notion of a sovereign state toward engineering new international institutions.<sup>89</sup> As a consequence, “representation – of sovereigns, interests, or ideas – has been replaced by metaphors of constructing and building by which issues were to be managed and problems was to be solved.”<sup>90</sup>

This leaves us with a question: who become the losers in this struggle? What ideas, projects, and groups are marginalized when diplomats engage in forum talks, build new institutions, outsource, and engage in military diplomacy? In demonstrating diplomats’ ability to not just represent but also produce world politics, this book has been more silent on those that diplomats get to govern, from Iranian civilians to HIV-positive homosexuals in Africa. Moreover, it has not addressed situations where diplomacy is excluded, silenced, or disempowered in world politics (beyond when it is strategically outsourced or when diplomatic tasks are shared with others). Yet, given the potential of the relational approach to address exactly such processes, this is a task that needs to be taken up in future studies. Exploring the non-diplomatic blank spots on the map will be crucial to our understanding of the diplomatic production of world politics.

### Diplomacy and power: just greasing the wheels?

The second challenge to the relational approach adopted in this book concerns the way in which questions of power and responsibility become obscure.<sup>91</sup> To see how this plays out, let us return to the

<sup>89</sup> Sharp, “Who Needs Diplomats?”; Kelley observes a move from “diplomacy as an institution” to “diplomacy as a behavior”; see John Robert Kelley, “The New Diplomacy: Evolution of a Revolution,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 21(2), 2010, 288.

<sup>90</sup> Sharp in an earlier piece also called “Who Needs Diplomats” writes about the dilemma of diplomats being 100 percent true to the sending state or diplomats being “ambitious internationalists” who act so detached from the state that their action is not authoritative for their sending state anymore; see Paul Sharp, “Who Needs Diplomats? The Problems of Diplomatic Representation,” *International Journal*, 52(4), 1997, 610.

<sup>91</sup> For another version of this argument about power and diplomatic studies, see Rebecca Adler-Nissen, “Just Greasing the Wheels? Mediating Difference or the Evasion of Power and Responsibility in Diplomacy,” *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 10(2), 2015.

conversation with my MFA colleague about the gap between theory and practice. What did my colleague mean with “being within target”? It is a way of saying that the foreign service is merely the skilled interpreter of a gut feeling, diplomats try to “sense” or “embody” the national interest. As Sending notes, whereas diplomats simply “manage frictions” as professional strangers, “humanitarians can be said to share a substantive commitment that cuts across territorial units”; they act as professional friends.<sup>92</sup> In other words, diplomats are messengers, but the substance is defined somewhere else and by someone else (the minister, the line ministry, or an external consultant).

However, this argument is based on a fiction of a substantive national interest that can be identified and possessed. This fiction, of course, is necessary for most forms of diplomatic negotiations, but it does not always have the kind of vitalism or societal backing that most IR theories implicitly assume. Much of what is promoted as “national interests” is never (and has never been) discussed in parliamentary assemblies or among government ministers as the “information asymmetry” that Pouliot identifies also reveals. Nonetheless, even when they are deeply implicated in global governance projects, diplomats still pass as messengers.

This self-understanding as mediator and messenger – rather than manager and policy producer – can have almost perverse effects. I recall a discussion in the Danish MFA on the EU’s response to the refugee crisis following the international intervention in Libya in March 2011. I was working in the MFA when the Arab Spring erupted. (It was not called “Arab Spring” internally in the ministry because everybody was aware of the important differences between the processes in the North African countries). Whereas the Ministry of Refugee, Immigration, and Integration Affairs called for a review of visa possibilities for selected groups of refugees from Libya, the MFA concentrated on finding a position that could balance domestic concerns and the median position among the EU member states – our partners.

When I asked for a clarification of the MFA’s position on the refugee crisis, the response from my superior was that “we follow governmental policy.” But the governmental policy had yet to be defined, and the MFA was a party to the negotiations on how to handle the refugee situation. In the end, the Danish foreign minister was equipped with the

<sup>92</sup> Ole Jacob Sending, Chapter 9, this volume.

following speech notes for the Council of Foreign Ministers' meeting: "We support that the general visa dialogue continues with Southern neighbours. Still too early to consider negotiations on visa facilitation and visa liberalization." So we would just go with the flow. This is illustrative of what Neumann identifies as how "system maintainers experience themselves as minor players."<sup>93</sup> It is, however, also a very comfortable position because one can pretend that one is not taking sides.

Yet, every MFA across the world has strategic departments and policy offices handling everything from the Middle East to development policies or international law and human rights. Over the years, these MFA offices and departments have developed their own takes on these issues that they deal with on a routine basis. For instance, it is likely that every MFA in the world has its own position (and institutional memory) on the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Of course, MFAs do produce policy. However, the way that scholars describe diplomacy, it is always about the process and bargaining tactics, but seldom about the production of ideas and policies. This book has begun addressing the ideological and practical work that goes into the diplomatic making of world politics and the engineering of new international institutions, using terms such as "collective intentionality," "commitment," "pure love-ethics," and "the international administration of war."

More broadly, then, the implication of the relational approach adopted in this book is that diplomacy cannot keep the innocence or detachment that some of its practitioners (and theorists) would want it to keep. This book has problematized the understanding of diplomacy as a third culture. Diplomats contribute to defense planning and organization,<sup>94</sup> war making,<sup>95</sup> humanitarianism,<sup>96</sup> conflict management and mediation,<sup>97</sup> polity building and multilateral governance,<sup>98</sup> international law making,<sup>99</sup> and economic reordering.<sup>100</sup> Diplomacy is deeply entangled in the world it helps constitute. On the one hand, as several contributors show, it is becoming militarized to the degree that

<sup>93</sup> Iver Neumann, Chapter 5, this volume.

<sup>94</sup> Krieger, Souma, and Nexon, Chapter 8, this volume.

<sup>95</sup> Tarak Barkawi, Chapter 2, this volume.

<sup>96</sup> Ole Jacob Sending, Chapter 9, this volume.

<sup>97</sup> Iver Neumann, Chapter 5, this volume.

<sup>98</sup> Vincent Pouliot, Chapter 3, and Jennifer Mitzen, Chapter 4, this volume.

<sup>99</sup> Ian Hurd, Chapter 1, this volume.

<sup>100</sup> Leonard Seabrooke, Chapter 7, this volume.

it becomes absurd to define it as the resolution of conflict by peaceful means. On the other hand, "when conflict is diplomatized, it changes the conflict, but it also changes diplomacy."<sup>101</sup>

The editors note: "As far as authority is concerned, what sets diplomats apart from other types of actors is not that they exclusively engage in representation, but that they claim – usually with success – jurisdictional control over it."<sup>102</sup> In other words, diplomats have the ability to officially represent – and act on behalf of – a state or an organization or institution of some sort. However, as we also learn, this is only part of the story. Diplomats keep the conversation going, but in doing so they also help shape it. What makes diplomacy particular is not just that it focuses on formal representation, but that it sees itself as responsible for managing relations, yet often sneaks away from responsibility for the content of these relations. It is now time that the power-diplomacy nexus is explored in more depth,<sup>103</sup> and this requires further research. If diplomacy is as deeply implicated in the making of world politics as this volume suggests, it not only questions IR theoretical understandings of what drives international relations, but it also challenges the idea that foreign policy is decided by (more or less democratically accountable) governments. So how is the diplomatic making of world politics to be held accountable?

Adopting a relationalist view, the answer cannot be framed in terms of a principal-agent logic – whereby accountability equals control with diplomats depicted as power holders. A relational view of power does not see power as a resource or a substance, one that different individuals or states possess in varying quantities. Instead, power is conceptualized as productive energy that simultaneously shapes and is shaped by social interactions. To address the power involved in the diplomatic making of world politics requires us to trace power in practice, that is, the emergent power, which plays out as a never-ending struggle for recognition as competent.<sup>104</sup> Rather than seeking to attribute power in a reified entity – an actor such as a state or political leader – power can be studied by exploring the actual production of world politics.

<sup>101</sup> Iver Neumann, Chapter 5, this volume. <sup>102</sup> Introduction, this volume.

<sup>103</sup> Sharp, "Diplomacy, Diplomatic Studies, and the ISA."

<sup>104</sup> Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Vincent Pouliot, "Power in Practice: Negotiating the International Intervention in Libya," *European Journal of International Relations*, 20(4), 2014, 889–911.



## Conclusion

Diplomats and mainstream IR theory have been mutually estranged. Many diplomats find IR scholarship problematic because it presents their job in abstract and reductionist terms. IR theory seldom takes diplomatic knowledge and practice seriously. Diplomacy, according to many realist and liberalist IR scholars, is done by unitary, sometimes even rational, states with more or less fixed national interests that determine negotiations. Alternatively, constructivists interpret diplomacy as inter-action with mutual signaling of values and identities. Both the image of billiard balls bumping into one another and the image of continuous signaling are far from how diplomats experience world politics. Meanwhile, IR theorists complain about the anecdotal character of diplomatic history and ambassadors' memoirs. Basically, diplomatic self-narratives do not reflect the deeper mechanisms of international relations.<sup>105</sup> This is where this volume provides a richer view of how diplomacy works in practice, by showing that diplomacy is much more than the mediation of estrangement.

I have suggested that one of the reasons for the estrangement between IR scholars and diplomats is that much of IR theory is substantialist, while diplomats work with a relational ontology. For the diplomat, the primary unit of analysis is relations (not states) – what I called the diplomatic folk relationalism. The analysis of diplomacy's role in world politics has been hindered by a priori classifications of diplomacy in state focused, actor-centric ways. Diplomats have been interpreted as substantives that act, rather than nouns that come into being.<sup>106</sup> However, as Barkawi insists in his discussion of Iraq and the war in Syria, we cannot think of "Iraq" as some kind of unitary actor (of course this is true for all states). Instead, we need to recall the web of relations sustaining the war in Syria, the international flows of money, people, material, and arms. The association between peaceful means and diplomacy is problematic. More generally, diplomacy is deeply entangled; it is constantly reproduced and reproducing of other social practices in world politics.

<sup>105</sup> See Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, "Diplomatic History and International Relations Theory: Respecting Difference and Crossing Boundaries," *International Security*, 22(1), 1997.

<sup>106</sup> Ole Jacob Sending, Chapter 9, this volume.

Uncritically taking on the relational ontology of diplomacy has at least two major pitfalls. First is the risk of accepting the view that diplomacy is a meta-relational practice of mediation. Indeed, if we take the diplomats' own account at face value, diplomacy appears almost empty – it is about mediation and representation, not governance. Arguably, others (line ministries, foreign powers, governments, etc.) feed in with political content, but diplomats are not themselves policy makers. A relational approach as the one sketched out in this book should not stop at the analysis of the co-constitution of diplomacy and other aspects of world politics. Further research should look at the way in which responsibility disappears when diplomacy turns into governance. Deeply entangled in wars, treaty making, refugee crises, and so on, diplomacy is much more than the mediation of estrangement. We also need studies that look into the limits of diplomacy when other international practices, peoples, or technologies manage to silence or marginalize the diplomatic production of world politics.

Second, and related to the first, a relational approach should not avoid the question of power. On the contrary, it should promote a different way of assigning responsibility (today, it is usually with governments, rarely with diplomats). The IR discipline is in need of approaches that can address basic questions about power and influence. A relational approach, as the one proposed in this book, insists that diplomacy's system-maintaining functions, the grease on the wheels, is indeed greasy. Moving from units to relations thus involves less attention to national win-sets and other forms of unhelpful reductionism and more attention to the actual making of world politics.